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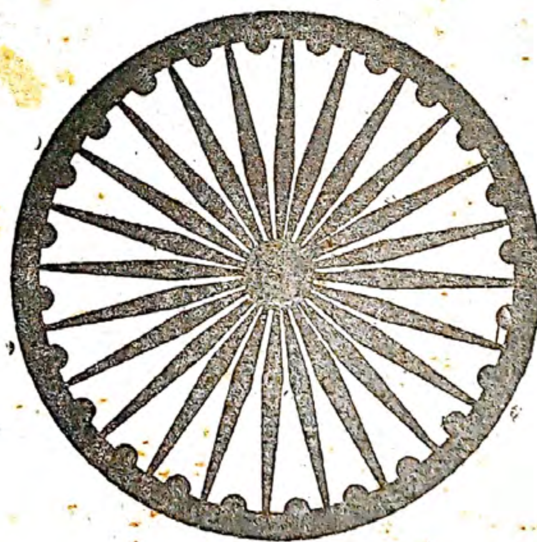
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A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE HŪṆAS[1]

By

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No efforts have hitherto been made to present a systematic account of the coinage of the Hūṇas who played such an important part not only in the history of India but also in the world. Their antiquity is vouchsafed in the epics and in the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*[2]. They influenced the course of Indian history in the first half of the sixth century A.D. and they seem to have been absorbed in the Indian population afterwards. They were past master in imitation and their coin types are the best examples of such imitation. A study of the Hūṇa coinage is full of interesting and obscure points and as such there are immense possibilities of a scientific numismatic research in this field. The Hūṇa coins are replete with ticklish problems still baffling all the scholarly ingenuity. They seem to have brought to India the Sassanian style of coinage which was prevalent in Gujrat and Rajputana[3] till about 1000 A. D. They generally imitated the coinage of the kings they annihilated and the places they ransacked. In India, they imitated the coins of their conquered territories and that is evident from the numerous coins that have been found at Chiniot and Shāhakoṭa[4]. They did not invent any new design and all their coins hitherto discovered and published testify to our point of view.

The money economy was a factor to be reckoned with in the early parts of the fourth-fifth-sixth centuries A. D. in India. The very fact that the Guptas had a well organised currency is indicative of the fact that money economy was a very important

1. For the Hūṇas–see : R. K. Choudhary, *The Hūṇa invasion of India*, in the Altekar Commemoration Volume of the *JBRS*, XXXXV (1959).
2. Wilson's edition (1840), pp. 177, 194.
3. R. K. Choudhary, *op. cit.*
4. *JASB*, 1894, part, i.

factor. Even prior to the Guptas, the Kuṣāṇas and later the Kidāra Kuṣāṇas had organised currency and that was responsible for the growth of trade and commerce in those regions. The disturbing Hūṇa raids over the peaceful trading routes of Central Asia had possibly started in about the fourth century A. D.[1] These raids were practically responsible for the baser gold coins of the Kidāra Kuṣāṇas. It has been held that the commercial activities of the valley of Kashmir ebbed with the rise of the Hūṇas. In view of their disturbing raids and depredation over the important overland trade routes in Central Asia and adjoining territories, important routes had to be closed. Naturally therefore there was reversion to agriculture and that consequently led to the establishment of feudalism in the valley. With the fall of the Kuṣāṇas in about 300 A.D., the influence of the Sassanides was felt throughout Afganistan for about four centuries and during this period the Hūṇas made their appearance and the whole of Afganistan including Kashmir was convulsed. The Hūṇas had their settlements near Ghazni and they were known as *Zbulis* or *ZAVALIS* or *Zāvali*.

The legend on their coins like *Śāhi*, *Śānśāha*, *Khautai*, *Bāgo*, *Buzurga*, etc. are indicative of the fact that their language belonged to the Iranian stock[2]. Even the names Toramāṇa and Mihirakula are said to have Iranian tinge. The *Lalitavistara* refutes the Chinese contention that the Hepthalites had no written character. The *Lalitavistara* refers to *Hūṇalipi* and on the coins of the Khionites-Hepthalites we have scripts in partly looped and elongated character[3]. The two Hūṇa inscriptions have come to light from Afaganistan[4] and some of the manuscripts in Hephthalite characters are said to have been preserved in Berlin (*Klio*-N. S. 1951, pp-11-60—41-69). In the *Kura Inscription*[5], Toramāna

1. *ARASI*, 1913-14, pp 50-51.
2. Cf. O. G. Von Wesendont. *Kushan, Chioniton and Hepthaliten, KLIO*, 1933. P. 345.
3. H. Junger- *Die Hepthalitische Munzinshriften* (Berlin, 1930); cf. *JAOS*, 1944, pp. 1-3; *JNSI*, XXII. 102.
4. *JRAS*, 1954, p. 112 ff; *EI*, I. 239; Choudhary, *op. cit.*
5. *JRAS*, 1954.

designates himself as *Tsavala* or *Jauvala* and so does Mihirakula in the *Uruzgan Inscription*[1]. The Arab writers identify Zabulistan with Afganistan or the land of the Zabuls. On the Horseman and Sassanian types of the silver coins of Toramāna *Jaubla, Jabula* and *Jabubla* are mentioned (*Transactions of the Ninth Congress of the Orientalists*-1892, p. 235 ff). On the Epthalite coins these terms are mentioned in Persianised form and are mentioned as *Zabol* (*Numismatic Chronicle*-1894, pp. 276-8). All these are sufficient to show that the Hūṇas were acquainted with the alphabet and they went accepting the written characters and legends of the countries they conquered[2]. A king of the name Rāmānīla or Ramanila of Zabula is known to us from the coins and Ghiraman identifies this king with Toramāna[3]. The Hūṇa influence was so great in western India that a Tomara chief (in one of the inscriptions of Mahendrapāla I) calls himself a *Jauvala* or *Jāula*[4]. The Hūṇas were known by the designation of *Jauvala*. Two silver coins (edited by A. K. Narain) of the coin cabinet of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Archaeology, Hindu University, Benares,[5] are attributed to the Hūṇa and one of them bears the legend "*Jayatu Yabu(pu)sara*". The reverse of that coin shows the traces of altar in the centre with attendants on either side. Narain holds that the type of the sun standard is not found on any Epithalite coins, though there is something like it on one of the coins examined by Cunningham[6]. It may be mentioned here that the Hūṇas are described as sun worshippers by the Chinese travellers[7]. On the basis of the above two coins,

1. *Ibid.*
2. Cf. *Acta Orientalia*, (Budapest)—Vol. I, pp. 141-188, where Louis Ligeti discusses the question of the language of the Hūṇas ; R. K. Kavi (ed.) *Caturbhaṇi*, p. 15 ; Cf. the edition of V. S. Agrawal and Motichandra, pp. 181-182. Here we get an account of the brutality of the Hūṇas.
3. *Les Chionites Hepthalites*, p. 35.
4. L. V. Pouissim, *Dynasties et histoire de Inde depuis Kaniṣkn Jusqu'aux invasions Mussalmans*, p. 123 ; Choudhary, *op. cit.*
5. *JNSI*, XI. 141 ff.
6. Cunningham, *Later Indo-Scythians*, pp. 252-253, 283; cf. Prinsep, *Indian Antiquities*, Vol. I. p. 412.
7. Beal, II, 284-85 ; Choudhary, *op. cit.*

we further learn that Toramāna was also known as *Śāh Jauvala, Javala* or *Javuvla*. *Jabusara* was only a variant of a title of the same name applied to Toramāna. The legend has no doubt Sassanian influence on it. V. A. Smith has published a copper coin of Toramāna with solar wheel and the *Brāhmī* legend "*Tora*"[1].

Most of the Hūṇa kings are known to us from their coins. They are known to have ruled over parts of Afganistan, Kashmir and the Punjab. Their coins with different name-endings have been discovered from the Punjab. Some such coins (with *Āditya* name ending) were published by James Prinsep[2]. The Hūṇas, under Lae-Lih (according to the Chinese sources), wrested Gandhāra from the Kidāra Kuṣāṇas. This Lae-Lih of the Chinese sources is identified with Lakhana Udayāditya of the Punjab coins, though it is doubted by some scholars[3]. Whitehead, in his study of the Hūṇa coinage[4], has shown that there is either Pahlevi legend or a few *Brāhmī* legend on the coins of early Hūṇas and also some Hindu symbols like conch etc. It is a fact that Toramāna and Mihirakula did not adopt any such title as Udayāditya or so but that does not preclude the possibility of the Hūṇas adopting such titles later on when they were completely Hinduised in course of their Indian compaign. Among the Punjab Hūṇa coins published by Hœrnle[5] there were some coins of Mihirakula counterstruck by the legend Toramāna. There is no doubt that the coin under reference is problematic in the sense that Toramāna is shown after Mihirakula. Whether Mihirakula had a son of that name or there was another king of the name of Toramāna, it is difficult to say in the present state of our knowledge.

Altekar examined some Hūṇa coins of the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, and came to the conclusion that Toramāna

1. V. A. Smith, *Catalogue of the Coins in the Indian Museum*, Vol. I, pp. 232, 235 (Plate, XXXV. 4).
2. Prisep, *Essays*, I. 411.
3. *JNSI*, IX, part I.
4. *JASB*, 1913, 481 ff.
5. *PASB*, 1885, pp. 4-7.

borrowed Sassanian type in Afganistan, Gupta type in India and Kuṣāṇa type in Kashmir. In the third coin of the museum examined by Altekar, there is '*Jaya*' on the reverse which according to Altekar is not found on the seven of the early coins of Toramāna. Altekar suggestes that these coins were issued by the rulers of the Karakoṭa dynasty of Kashmir in the seventh century A.D. and not by the Hūṇa Toramāna[1]. He arrives at the conclusion that Toramāna types were issued in copper by the Karakoṭas. According to the Kashmir Chronicler, *Śrivara*, the name of Toramāna continued to be minted down to the time of Husan Shah (1472-1485)[2]. All Toramāna copper coins of Kashmir are written in *Brāhmī* characters of the fifth-sixth centuries A. D. On the authority of the *RT*, it is asserted that this Toramāna of Kashmir was different from his Hūṇa namesake and probably belonged to the Kidāra Kuṣāṇas[3]. Whatever might have been the identity of this Toramāna, it seems plausible to agree with Cunningham that the Toramāna types of coins were originally struck by the Hūṇa Toramāna. It may be mentioned in this connection that in the *Indian Museum Catalogue* (Plate-XXVII, 2-3), the word "*Kidāra*" is absent. Both the Toramāna issues and other issues of the Karakoṭas are supposed to have in the obverse the word *kidāra* or simply "*ki*" but we are not very definite on this point[4]. A large number of copper coins with the legend of Toramāna were current up to the end of the Hindu rule in Kashmir and the date of its initial circulation might go back to the sixth century A.D. Copper coin of Toramāna were discovered along with the muslim Sultans of Kashmir at Avantipur[5].

The Hūṇas continued to rule Kashmir even when they were driven out of a major portion of India. In 520 A.D. Sung-Yun reach-

1. *JNSI*, XI, 58.
2. Stein, *RT*. II, 315 ; For the Hūṇa coins in the British Museum, *JNSI*, XXIII, 2.
3. and III (a). *Later Indo-Scythians*, pp. 88-90.
4. S. C. Ray, *Early History and Culture of Kashmir*, p. 33 ff ; *JNSI*, XIV, 152 ; XII, 152 ff.
5. *ARASI*, 1913-14 ; Śrīpratāpa legend. Kashmir coins have been found in Monghyr, Patna, parts of U. P. and Madhyapradeśa ; vide, *JNSI*-X. 30-32.

ed Trans-Oxiana and there he found the Hepthalite Sultan seated on a golden throne in his felt tent and accepting gifts brought to him from forty countries which his armies had conquered in a number of invasions[1]. It leads to conclude that Mihirakula was a powerful ruler and his conquest of Gandhāra was a reality by now. Mihirakula's rule in Kashmir seems to have continued further by other Hūṇa rulers as some names disclose foreign identity. A unique silver coin with the legend, *Devaśāhikhiṅgila,* is an unmistakable proof of the Hepthalite rule[2,3]. He is identified with Lakhana Narendrāditya of Kalhaṇa who possibly ruled after 550 A. D. A coin of Lakhana Udayāditya was noticed in the Punjab[4]. Kalhaṇa mentions a king of that name belonging to the Hūṇa stock but his *biruda* was Narendrāditya and not Udayāditya as we find in the Punjab coins. Cunningham identified Lakhana Narendrāditya with Udayāditya who struck silver coins of Hepthalite Hūṇa type[5]. Stein has also given a detailed description of the various types of the alleged Kashmirian Hūṇa coins[6].

From the *RT* it is evident that the Hūṇas continued to influence the history of Kashmir even after Mihirakula. Hiraṇyakula, Vasukula and Toramāna look like Hūṇa names. They seem to have been Hinduised Hūṇa princes. According to Kalhaṇa, Vasukula was succeeded by Mihirakula, who was noted for his cruelty and ruthlessness. He is said to have massacred innumerable persons and inflicted a crushing defeat on the king of Ceylon. Some of his supernatural deeds also find place in the *RT*. We are not all concerned with the historicity of Kalhaṇa's[7] statement here except to the extent it helps us in studying the numismatic problems of the Hūṇas. Kalhaṇa's description of Mihirakula as a devotee of Śiva

1. Foucher, *Iranian Civilisation*, p. 297 ; cf. *History of Pusto Literarture*, II.
2. P. C. Bagchi, *India and China*, p. 74 ; Chodhary, *op. cit.*
3. *Later Indo-Scythians*, Plate VII. 11.
4. *JNSI*, IX.
5. *Later Indo-Scythians*, pp. 97, 111.
6. *RT*, III. 383 fn.
7. *Indian Museum Catalogue*, Vol. I ; Plate XXV. 5.

receives confirmation from his coins which contain the theriomorphic representation of Śiva[1]. His Śaivite leaning is also known to us from his other coins where the *Triśūla* and the *Nandī* appear and the legends read as "*Jayatu Vṛiṣabhadhvaja*"[2]. Disalkar[3], on an examination of the Gandhia copper coins, has also tried to prove that the Hūṇa coinage was nothing more than a rude copy of the Sassanians. Buehler held that there were two Toramāṇas and Mihirakulas[4]—first of the *Kura Inscription* and another of the *Eran Inscription.* Since the clarifications regarding these points have been elaborately discussed by me in my recent paper, *The Hūṇa Invasion of India,* I do not want to repeat them here. The latest note on the Hūṇa coinage is by A. K. Narain, who has recently published nine copper coins of Toramāṇa and Mihirakula[5]. Notable among the collections are (i) a re-struck coin of Toramāṇa (No. 4) and (ii) Toramāṇa coins over-struck by Mihirakula (No. 5). In this connection it may be mentioned here that these coins too were discovered from the Punjab. There is nothing specific in these coins since most of the varities are well known. All the Punjab Hūṇa coins exhibit Sassanian bust and the *Brāhmī* legend.

The Hūṇas do not seem to have invented any new variety or any new type. The coins, discovered so far, do not show any specific type that might be attributed to the Hūṇa origin, though the Toramāṇa types of Kashmir influenced the coinage of that area for a pretty long time. Their coinage shows influence of the Sassanians, the Kidāra Kuṣāṇas, the Western Kṣatrapas, the Guptas and the Maukharīs. Silver and copper were used by them. The imitation is no doubt rude and sometimes clumsy. Bull and peacock have been used as symbols on their coins. We know that the Maukharīs continued to use the Gupta Era. The dates on Harṣa's coins are reckoned in a new era established by himself in 606 A. D. It is a striking testimony to the havoc wrought by

1. Cunningham, *Coins of Medieaval India*, p. 27 ; *RT*, I, 306.
2. *JNSI*, VIII, p. 66 ff.
3. *EI*, I, 239.
4. *JNSI*, XXIV. 41 ff.

the Hūṇa invasion (Rapson-*Indian-Coins*-p. 34). It should be noted here that in the field of coinage the Hūṇas left no legacy behind unless the small coins which record the names of six Nāga princes of Narwar (northern Rajputana) may have been derived from it. The degenerate base pieces served as currency for the early Rajputas for centuries. They preserve the thin flat fabric but the head on the obsverse and the fire altar on the reverse become more debased. The Gaḍhiya coins, circulated down to a later period, show traces of Sassanian origin and may therefore be ascribed to the Hūṇas. The silver coins of Toramāna have the same legend as that on the coins of Buddhagupta. Mihirakula is credited with having built a Śiva temple in Kashmir (Kalhaṇa). The epigraphic and the numismatic sources go to show that the Hūṇas were Śaiva. The Chinese sources testify to the fact that Mihirakula loved to worship demons on account of his association with Śiva. Kalhaṇa compares Mihirakula with the God of destruction. The sun standard on some of the coins of Toramāna may be an allusion to his preference for solar worship. On one of his coins we find a solar wheel. The craftsmanship of the Hūṇa coinage was much below the standard set by the Kuṣāṇas and the Guptas and even their crude imitation was rather vague. The question of any originality of design does not arise and we see that their busts are coarse and brutal to the last degree.

Abbreviations :—

JBRS, Journal of the Bihar Research Society.
JASB (PASB), Journal (Proceedings) of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
ARASI, Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India.
JAOS, Journal of the American Oriental Society.
JRAS, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland.
JNSI, Journal of the Numismatic Society of India.
Beal, S-Buddhist Records of the Western world.
RT, Rājataraṅgini.
EI, Epigraphia Indica.